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ABSTRACT

Drawing from 18 years of experience as an adjunct professor at a community college and 3 years as a non-tenured full-time faculty member, the President of the Faculty Senate of Valencia Community College (VCC) offers a number of personal observations on the ways in which adjunct faculty and faculty senates can address the problems encountered by part-timers and caused by employment policies that rely heavily on them. The paper begins by stressing that adjunct faculty do have a voice on community college campuses, do have mentors, do have opportunities for professional inclusion on campus, and do have a chance for advancement--the problem often is that they don't know it. Efforts of VCC to cure many of the ills of adjunct faculty are highlighted, indicating that the college has realized a turnover of almost all of its long-standing part-time staff, it has paid serious attention to the orientation of adjuncts and has addressed the policies of tenure and renewal that affect these faculty members. In addition, the college's new Faculty Senate Constitution will allow for the inclusion of adjuncts as members, in meetings, and on committees. The paper discusses the role of the Senate as a forum for the problems that hiring adjuncts in greater numbers can create, and suggests that by attending Senate reforms are suggested. (AYC) management of the college, and the ways in which they are viewed by their full-time colleagues. While the personel course of action described in this paper is not necessarily advocated for all adjuncts, the effects of an increasing involvement in the activities of VCC's Faculty Senate and of a determination to gain recognition for the needs of adjuncts are described in positive terms. The difficulties in being a non-tenured faculty member are discussed and ways that the Community College Humanities Association and other organizations can serve as support groups for educational reforms are suggested. (AYC)

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A Faculty Senate President's View of the Plight of Adjunct Instructors

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The scenario that usually faces the "educator without a country" is this kind of dialogue: "I'm only an adjunct and I do not have a voice in the situation"; "I'm only an adjunct and there is nothing I can do about my rights"; "Who will listen to me or communicate with me, I'm only an adjunct." These statements are not unfamiliar to anyone who has been on a college campus long enough to know how the college operates or to the sympathetic ear of what is loosely referred to as "a colleague."

In order to establish my credibility in this discussion, you need to know that I operated in that posture for eighteen years before I accidentally 'crossed over.' I began. as many good adjuncts do, hungry to teach on the college level and willing to sacrifice to bring this to fruition. I had taught high school for six years and was a brand new mother. So, when I was offered a class to teach two nights a week at the community college, it was ideal. It wasn't ideal solely because it was convenient, having a new little one to concentrate on, but because it meant that I could begin to prepare for the time when I wouldn't have to be at home and that I could teach at a different level. It was going to be the beginning of fulfilling a goal -- hardly realizing the number of years that would be involved in this endeavor. Now some twenty years later, I sit here still unfulfilled. The question is, am I to blame? When I now realize that there are some fighters out there in the adjunct's corner, I just wish that I could have joined forces long ago. I am in my third year of a pre-tenure appointment. That is why I say still unfulfilled, because what college educator ever has the luxury of complete academic freedom without tenure? We can all postulate

the unreality of "It doesn't matter!", but that is nonsense.

As if the twenty years isn't enough, I also have had a rather unique set of circumstances provided for me which have meant that I would walk very softly and hide my big stick. For the past year, I have been President of the Collegewide Faculty Senate. Before this, I served as a Senator for three years, was Vice-President of the West Campus, President of the West Campus, and Vice-President of the Collegewide Faculty. I am very proud of those accomplishments. I have learned more about higher education than I ever expected to and I have enjoyed being involved in the governance and management of my institution. It hasn't always been easy to be non-tenured and be part of a decision-making body. But, I have survived, a better educator as a result.

What I have been able to observe, in our college at least, is that there is great empathy for adjuncts, or what I call the "have-nots." Not only empathy, but genuine concern and professional cooperation. What I see is that the "have-nots" do have a voice, they do have mentors, they do have an opportunity for professional inclusion on a campus, and they do have a chance for advancement. Yes, even that! The problem often is that they don't know it. I never knew what the Faculty Senate was, if I knew about it at all, until I had been working for the college at least four years.....and, unless you have a very curious nature, you may never know.

All campuses have some kind of faculty or professional organization that has as its charge the lobbying for better conditions -- for faculty, for students, and for the institution. These groups might be a well-established senate organization or

they might be one of the other associations that support faculty and student causes, such as FACC, the United Faculty of Florida, AAWCJC, AAWCJC, AAUW, or any number of other regional groups. The point is that there are many more ways than one to get action and many times these groups can stir up the pot so that someone will take notice of the problem.

In the past four years at Valencia, I have watched the way in which problems were addressed by the faculty, concerning adjuncts, and have seen the action taken to cure many of the ills in this area. We have been able to realize a turnover of almost all of our long-standing part time staff, and some even not so long-standing. We have seen serious attention being given to orientation of these faculty (realize, if you will, that this is a mixed blessing that Helen will address). We have been addressing the serious policies of tenure and renewal that have a connection to the roles that adjuncts find themselves in. We have seen a growing respect being shown for this problem and for the people caught up in it. For example, our new Faculty Senate Constitution will allow for the inclusion of adjuncts in the meetings and on committees, and as members. Probably more than anything else, it has become a forum for the ills that hiring adjuncts in great number cause. If nothing else, the faculty has a way of communicating to the administration the injustices or unfair practices they detect in the system. There is no doubt that, if you speak softly but continually, you will instigate some kind of participation in solving the problem. These are all ways that I see of improving the misuse of adjuncts. We have to continue to make the problem visible and to have reasonable requests on their behalf. We have to strive for more full-time

faculty so that we eliminate the 'real' problems with adjuncts all together. We know that there are circumstances when they more than fill a need and that their existence is welcomed, but there is just too much danger in the numbers and the quality that presently fill our campuses.

Looking more closely at the opportunities that are available to adjuncts as they struggle with their many dilemmas, I can speak the most from the vantage point of the Faculty Senate. When I first attended meetings of the Senate, I was not a member but an observer. I became an observer because I felt that this organization would provide the insight I so desperately needed concerning the governance and management of the community college system. I was very right! I sat quietly for many months just listening - and - learning. Since I was mostly interested in making a difference in the process of turning over part-time instructors to full time positions, I tried to learn all that I could about the philosophy of the administration on that subject. I also was interested in how adjuncts were perceived by their peers or colleagues -- if it was possible to be accepted into that category as a "political orphan." It was something like an initiation period. I soon learned that I could be accepted as a worthwhile contributor to the system if I could win their respect as a creditable communicator. Once I had paid my dues, and the once uncertain full-timers began to feel comfortable with my presence, I could be involved in decision-making and action-taking processes. The more I persisted in participating, the more I learned, and the closer I came to becoming more effective in my role as an instructor. I know what I am saying can be easily translated to being crazy -- taking on far more work than

I could hope to be paid for. But I volunteered for committees and I was determined to gain recognition for that body of equal members that were considered the "silent majority." I worked one semester with one of the officers to revise the Senate constitution.

I am not proposing by my behavior that adjuncts should do what I did. What I would like to emphasize is that, if we choose to remain passive in our roles, we have to expect to be visualized this way ---- which too often gets translated to mean that we are satisfied.

The outcome of working with the Senate was that I would soon be called upon to take a stronger position. I was elected as Vice President and the next year inherited the Presidency. This could easily be perceived as, "Who wants the job anyway?" However, in truth, there were many full-time instructors who could have filled this position but by now I was ready and willing and sought after. All of this time, now running for eighteen years, I was still an adjunct. But, somehow, finally being accepted by my peers and the administrative staff as well made me something else. And, of course, I don't have to tell you what I thought I could gain for the adjunct cause from this position. I did have my contract status changed and I worked to keep the plight of the remaining adjuncts -- who had been with the college more than five years -- on the Senate agenda and on the College-wide Faculty Association agenda. It has worked well for the adjuncts at our college. Almost all of these contracts have been turned into full-time positions and the concerns for adjuncts have taken top priority in many areas of the college. Beginning with the CEO and coming down to the Department Chairs,

the problems that concern adjuncts are being addressed.

This kind of respect for an "academic step child" did not come overnight and did not come solely through the Senate organization. Many other organizations were involved. As a Faculty Senator, the network that is available of other like-institutions is a valuable resource. One that we have in Florida is the Faculty Senate President's Association that is a gathering of all of the Presidents of the 27 community colleges in the state. This is a powerful group that supports one another and is a strong lobbying body for all issues concerning community college faculty. They were one of the strong forces that worked on the State Board of Community Colleges - before that group had the final vote in the legislature - to stop the change of tenure probation. The proposal was to change the 3-5 year temporary contract, while waiting for a tenure appointment, to 5-7 years. This would, once again, abuse the use of part-time faculty. They could keep us part-time a good while longer. So it was a very important move that was made by this organization, along with others such as those made by the United Faculty of Florida, that disallowed the vote for such a change.

I had said earlier that my goal was as yet unfulfilled. The reason for saying that, is that I am still awaiting tenure. I was taken into the fold as a full-time employee in August of 1987, so you know how I am operating at this time....and I might add, I bristle <u>aloud</u> when someone asks me if I will be a better teacher because I finally will have tenure or if I am just 'acting' like one while I don't have it. All of those comments are irrational. The answer is that we are <u>different</u>. I am definitely operating -- as a human being (or maybe an inhuman

rabbit) does when a carrot is being dangled just out of my grasp. I do consider the consequences of some of my actions and I do find that -- instead of tenure probation serving the purpose it was meant for (to learn, to improve, to become) -- it is an uneasy time and I don't believe for a moment that I am the first to utter, "I can't because I don't have tenure!"

So, the pre-tenure posture is different from the post-tenure. The main difference is where we see that inhumane carrot. Once it disappears there is the same reaction that there is in any situation where there is a removal of something unpleasant.

I believe that this is especially true if you have had an unfair non-tenured relationship in your position. You certainly feel relief-- and I don't believe that one's classroom methodology is necessarily affected or that loyalty and ethical behavior is necessarily affected, but one's attitude of self-assurance is affected. I don't care what is said by those who come out of the birth canal self-assured, when you are an educator operating with others prepared in an equal manner and you are teaching the same material but there is that dividing line of tenure, you live with uncertainty.

It does worry me that the crossing over means that you now have to be considered on the side that you felt so estranged from all this time. I object to the line that is there altogether --- and, one thing is certain, once you have been there, you do not desert those who are still there.

Back to support groups. I believe that almost all educational organizations worry about this problem. They have serious reasons to. The value of the profession is at stake. So

I see it on many agendas and that is the way to provide the visibility that this problem needs to have to keep it in front of those who are truly working for educational reform. (AAUW,CTE,NEA)

What about CCHA? I believe that CCHA has demonstrated its concern loudly and clearly by returning this topic to its conference over and over again. They have provided a forum for further discussion. They have printed a program that calls attention to the problem by its inclusion. We need to keep this pressure on. WE need to continue to tell the world that professionally prepared people who do professionally equal jobs need to be treated equally.

If you don't have a faculty organization or you have a weak one, take some action with the full-time faculty to change that. Make them see how important it is to <u>them!</u> If you are in an institution that might not rehire an adjunct who makes waves then get in touch with the organizations who can help make the waves for you. Consider looking for the source of your dilemma...consider approaching your Chief Executive Officer. If the wheel never squeaks, it will <u>appear</u> that it doesn't need the oil. I often get the reaction that, "My adjuncts are very happy with their arrangements!" Even though I am quite aware that adjuncts come along, as I did, and are happy to have a part-time appointment in their field at a time when that is all that is convenient, <u>most</u> of them soon want conditions to take on more meaning and that means becoming a part of the full-time world.

No professionally prepared educator, worthy of their degree, can allow themselves to fall into the trap of saying, or even worse, feeling that, "I am <u>only an adjunct</u>!"

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